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Developing a Mitigation Plan in a Collaborative Environment

Savannah Harbor Expansion Project

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BACKGROUND

- Project conditionally authorized WRDA 1999
- Chiefs Report requires a GRR and Tier II EIS
- Need approval of 4 Federal agencies
  - Army, EPA, Interior, Commerce

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BACKGROUND

- Public and resource agencies were concerned about the level of uncertainty of the environmental impacts and acceptability of mitigation
- Decided to conduct the GRR and Tier II EIS through a Cooperating Agency format
- Participants are Corps (Lead), EPA, USFWS, NOAA-Fisheries, and Georgia

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GOALS OF INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

- Integration of Agency views during the process

- Interim approvals – rather than "grade the paper at the end"

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PROCESS

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INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Conducting at 4 levels

- Executive Management Group
- Lead & Cooperating Agencies
- Technical Teams
- Members of the Project Delivery Team

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EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT GROUP

- General Direction
- Priorities
- Acceptability of Plan Formulation Process
- Acceptability of major impact evaluation tools
  - -- Hydro & Salinity Model

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LEAD & COOPERATING AGENCIES TEAM

- ❑ Guidance on recommendations of field staff
- ❑ Participated in NEPA scoping meeting
- ❑ Participated in scoping of alternatives
- ❑ Agreed to composition of Detailed Plans

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TECHNICAL TEAMS

- Agency representatives
- Field level staff
- Based on specific critical resources / issues
  - Wetlands
  - Water Quality
  - Fisheries
  - Groundwater
  - Sediment Placement

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Agreements by Technical Teams

- Critical resources to analyze in detail
- Required field data
- Development of impact assessment tools
- Adequacy of impact assessment tools

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Agreements by Technical Teams

- Agreements documented through MFRs
  -- Provided to supervisors

- Major decisions taken to level of agency heads
  -- Require letter from agency

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Members of Project Delivery Team

- PDT holds weekly meetings (by phone)
- Project documents are posted on server with restricted access
- Cooperating Agency staff invited to participate
- Agencies' participation has

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Public Coordination

- Stakeholders Evaluation Group
- NEPA scoping meeting
- Public notices
- Public meetings

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Public Coordination

- Stakeholders Evaluation Group

  - Helped define studies to be conducted

  - 60 meetings of entire group over 113 mo.

    -- numerous committee meetings

    -- Corps briefs on study status

    -- Corps presents study results

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Public Coordination

- General Public (during course of the study)
  - -- Public Notices requesting comments
  - -- Formulation of Alternatives Report
  - -- Talks to local community organizations
  - -- Workshop on Mitigation Plans

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STATUS

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STATUS

- Agreement on resources to evaluate
- Agreement on tools to identify impacts
- Agreement on how to apply those tools for each resource
- Produced impacts from deepening only (no mitigation)

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STATUS

- Agencies provided advice on value of numerous mitigation measures (participated in incremental analysis)
- Corps finalized components of the mitigation plans on its own
- Corps documented the rationale for the mitigation plans. Will serve as the basis for the FWCA Report.

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SCHEDULE

- Aug 2008 -- AFB
- Nov/Dec 2008 -- Public review of Draft GRR and Draft EIS
- Apr 2009 -- Civil Works Review Board
- May 2009 -- Final Federal Agency decisions to occur during State & Agency review of Final Reports

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WRAP-UP

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OBSERVATIONS

- Coordination requires time & money
- Participation in the process appears to have increased agencies' trust
- Coordination with the agencies led to their support (lack of opposition) when that information was later shared with the public

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SURPRISES

- Cooperating Agencies concurred that specific studies might not lead to better results and need not be performed
- Agencies would not state that mitigation for a specific resource was acceptable without seeing the entire mitigation plan
- Agencies did not involve themselves in the inner workings of the project when

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CONCLUSIONS

- Coordination requires time & money
- Agencies better understand the Corps' actions
- Agency involvement has altered the outcome
  - Changed the measures considered to be acceptable mitigation

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QUESTIONS ?